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Meningitis Cases on the Rise in Milwaukee

Practicing Good Hygiene Key to Preventing Spread of Disease

The City of Milwaukee Health Department has identified an increase in the number of cases of meningitis caused by enteroviruses, particularly in children under three months of age. Enterovirus cases typically peak in August or September of each year; this July there were 20 cases reported, which is more than have been reported in any July for over a decade. It is highly likely that enterovirus activity will remain high for the next 2-3 months.

Enteroviruses are very common, and most cases – especially in adolescents and adults – have very few or no symptoms. Enteroviruses are primarily spread from person to person through contact with another person's feces, such as when changing a baby's diaper.

"The most effective way to prevent these infections is thorough, frequent hand washing," said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. "This advice is particularly important for expectant mothers and for those who live in the same house with children under 1 year of age."

In addition, children who are not thoroughly toilet-trained – especially those under 1 year of age, should avoid wading pools where feces can be easily accidentally spread. Finally, day care providers and others who change children's diapers must be extra vigilant in hand-washing and general hygiene.

Enterovirus infections are most dangerous for very young children. They can cause cough, fever, pink-eye, sore throat, chest discomfort, and rash - but they can also cause dangerous complications such as inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) or spinal cord (meningitis), paralysis, heart or liver infections, and even death.

Other causes of meningitis, such as meningococcal bacteria or other virus families, are unrelated to enterovirus infections.

Additional information can be found at the following web pages:

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/enterovirus/viral_meningitis.htm
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/enterovirus/non-polio_entero.htm
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/op/handwashing.htm